

Clopton, Abner Wentworth ^[1]

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by R. Hargus Taylor, 1979

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Abner Wentworth Clopton, clergyman and educator, was born in Pittsylvania County, Va., the second child of Robert and Frances Anderson Clopton. His father, a planter, had migrated to Pittsylvania from New Kent County, Va., following the Revolutionary War ^[2].

Young Clopton obtained the basic rudiments of an education through attendance at various common schools in the neighborhood of his boyhood home. A desire for further study led him to enroll at the Banister Academy, Pittsylvania County (1804–5) and to place himself under the tutelage of John W. Caldwell at the Guilford Academy, Guilford County ^[3] (1805–6). After teaching for one year at a private school in Williamsburg District, S.C., he entered The University of North Carolina ^[4] in January 1808, earning the A.B. degree in 1809 and the M.A. in 1812. He matriculated in the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania ^[5] in 1810 but did not complete the course of studies.

Clopton returned to Chapel Hill in 1812 to take charge of the preparatory school then connected with the university. His biographer, J. B. Jeter, has noted that his pupils were "almost universally the best that entered the regular classes of the University." As a supplement to his meager income as a teacher, and as an expression of his own deep sense of compassion for the sick, Clopton also engaged in the practice of medicine, to the benefit of both the students and the local residents of the university community.

Religious sentiments led Clopton to unite with Shockoe Baptist Church, Pittsylvania County, in 1812. Early in his career at Chapel Hill he began to give serious consideration to preparing himself for the ministry. Accordingly, he placed himself under the care of the Orange Presbytery (Presbyterian Church ^[6])—an unheard-of practice for an early nineteenth-century Baptist. He was ordained in October 1816, probably at the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, near Chapel Hill.

Clopton left Chapel Hill in the summer of 1819 to help establish and to superintend the Milton Female Academy, Milton, which was opened in January 1820. He remained with the academy, also serving as pastor of a Baptist church in the vicinity until his removal to Charlotte County, Va., in January 1823.

The last ten years of Clopton's life were spent in Charlotte County, where he was pastor of the Ash Camp, Chaney's Chapel, and Mossingford Baptist churches. Throughout the period he also traveled extensively as an agent of the Baptist General Tract Society and, later, of Columbian College, Washington, D.C. He led in the organization of the Virginia Society for the Promotion of Temperance in 1826, traveling throughout Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia on behalf of temperance reform.

Clopton produced a variety of pamphlets and articles in promotion of the causes he espoused. Together with Eli Ball, he edited and published a collection entitled *Wisdom's Voice to the Rising Generation, Being a Collection of the Best Addresses and Sermons on Intemperance*. ^[7] His method and manner of championing the Baptist cause in his "Review of Campbellism," which appeared in the pages of the Virginia Baptist weekly *Religious Herald* ^[8], prompted his biographer to evaluate him as an unsuccessful controversialist: "He was frequently impelled, by an ardent temperament, to employ expressions, which, if just, were repulsive, and likely to defeat his purpose."

An ill-suited marriage to Sally B. Warwick in 1803 terminated in a divorce obtained in 1809–10. He remained unmarried for the rest of his life.

Clopton was interred in the family cemetery in Pittsylvania County. His portrait is in the possession of the University of Richmond, Richmond, Va.

References:

Woodford B. Hackley, *Faces on the Wall* (1972).

Jeremiah B. Jeter, *A Memoir of Abner W. Clopton* (1837).

Additional Resources:

Abner Wentworth Clopton, Caswell County Historical Association: <http://ncccha.blogspot.com/2012/08/abner-wentworth-clopton.html> ^[9]

Abner Wentworth, 1784-1833 in the Internet Archive: <https://www.worldcat.org/search?>

[q=su%3AClopton%2C+Abner+Wentworth%2C+1784-1833.&qt=hot_subject](#) [10]

Abner Wentworth Clopton short bio in DocSouth: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/global/getBio.html?type=bio&id=pn0000327&name=Clopton,%20Abner%20Wentworth> [11]

Abner Wentworth Clopton Terry, (painting), Smithsonian Institute Record: http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID:siris_ari_126403 [12]

Jeter, Jeremiah Bell. *A memoir of Abner W. Clopton*. Richmond, Yale & Wyatt. 1837. <https://archive.org/details/memoirofabnerwcl00jete> [13] (accessed May 10, 2013).

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